



**U.S. AIR FORCE**

## **This Week in USAF and PACAF History** **25 April – 1 May 2011**



30 Apr 1908 **First Air National Guard unit.** Aviation enthusiasts in the 1st Company, Signal Corps, New York National Guard, organized an “aeronautical corps” to learn ballooning—the earliest known involvement of guardsmen in aviation. Organized that year into the 1st Aero Squadron, the unit was federalized for service in 1916 as the 102nd Rescue Squadron, New York ANG. The 102nd is recognized as the oldest of all official ANG units.

29 Apr 1918 **Lt. Edward V. Rickenbacker**, the leading U.S. ace of World War I with 26 victories, **shot down his first airplane.** Some little-known items on the “**Ace of Aces**” –

Rickenbacker’s father died when he was still a boy. A few years later, Eddie got a job road-testing cars, which led him into auto racing and to his original nickname “Fast Eddie” (he preferred “Rick”). At the start of World War I, he changed his name from the Germanic “Reichenbacher” to “Rickenbacker.” He traveled to England in 1916 to develop an English racing car, and was closely monitored by counter-intelligence agents.

Rickenbacker had already enlisted in the Army when the U.S. entered the war. Rickenbacker wanted to fly and suggested that the Army man a combat flying unit with racing drivers, but the Army refused. Most pilot candidates were graduates of prestigious colleges, but after repairing a car carrying Colonel Billy Mitchell, Rickenbacker got his wish to transfer to an aviation unit. However, he was designated an engineering officer and could practice flying only during his free time. His superiors finally allowed him to get his wings after he proved that he had a qualified replacement. Rickenbacker (photo at right) eventually commanded the 94th “Hat in the Ring” Squadron.



25-26 Apr 1944 Lt. Carter Harman of the 1st Air Commando Group (standing at left in the photo) rescued four men from the Burmese jungle in the **first U.S. Army Air Forces combat rescue by helicopter.**



In late April 1944, a 1st Air Commando L-IB (a small plane) crash landed deep behind Japanese lines in Burma with three wounded British soldiers aboard. Lt. Harman flew his helicopter from his base in India on a circuitous 500-mile route to avoid the Japanese. He had to stop for fuel every 100 miles at landing zones cut out of the Burma jungles by friendly ground commandos. He flew to a clearing near the crash site, picked up

the first British soldier and took him to an emergency strip prepared by British commandos on sand-bar 10 miles away. He went back and picked up the second soldier, but an overheated engine forced him to remain at the sandbar overnight. He went back the next morning to get the third soldier and then went back again and got the L-IB pilot.



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1 May 1945 **Operation CHOWHOUND.** Eighth Air Force sent nearly 400 B-17s from England on a mercy mission to drop nearly 700 tons of food to starving civilians in German-occupied Holland. The Germans approved this flight and promised not to shoot down the bombers if they flew along specified routes so as not to observe German troop positions. Eighth Air Force and RAF bombers flew five more missions and delivered nearly 7,900 tons of food.



1 May 1943 Staff Sergeant Maynard Harrison "**Snuffy**" **Smith**, a gunner aboard a B-17 Flying Fortress in World War II, **earned the Medal of Honor** for his conduct during his very first combat mission. Smith was the first enlisted airman to be awarded the Medal of Honor. The photo at left is Smith receiving his award from Secretary of War Henry Stimson. When Stimson landed at his base, Smith was called away from Kitchen Patrol (KP) duty for the presentation.

On that first mission, Smith's aircraft was badly damaged by German fighters and anti-aircraft artillery. Fires on the aircraft were fed by the fuel supply and burned so hot that they melted holes in the airframe and starting exploding the ammunition stores. Despite the fact that he could have bailed out and several other crewmembers had already done so, Smith stayed onboard to aid wounded crewmembers. For 90 minutes, Smith fired at enemy fighters, threw ammunition out of the aircraft, fought the fires and gave first aid to the wounded. When his fire-fighting resources were exhausted, he wrapped himself in protective clothing and put out flames by hand. The aircraft was hit by over 3,500 bullets and pieces of shrapnel, and it broke in two as it touched down in England.

26 Apr 1949 Lt Gen George E. Stratemeyer became **Commanding General, Far East Air Forces**, Tokyo, taking over from Lt Gen Ennis G. Whitehead. Gen Stratemeyer remained commander until 9 June 1951. His book, "The Three Wars of Lt. Gen. George E. Stratemeyer: His Korean War Diary," is available at the Air Force Historical Studies Office.

1 May 1960 **U-2 Shoot-down.** A U-2 flying out of Pakistan on a secret CIA/USAF flight over the Soviet Union was shot down by a salvo of fourteen SA-2 missiles. The U-2 pilot, a former Air Force officer named Francis Gary Powers, was unable to employ the U-2's self-destruct mechanism before his capture, and the wreckage was recovered by the Russians (photo below). Among other items, they found the aircraft's camera with its film and Powers' survival pack, which included 7500 rubles and some jewelry. When Pres. Eisenhower refused to apologize publicly for the incident, Soviet Premier Khrushchev cancelled a summit meeting. Powers was convicted of espionage by the Russians, but he was later exchanged for a captured Soviet agent. This incident worsened Soviet relations with both the U.S. and Pakistan, and accelerated the U.S. satellite reconnaissance program.





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26 Apr 1966 **The Navy leaves MAC.** The SECDEF approved a joint recommendation by the Air Force and Navy to discontinue Navy participation in the Military Airlift Command.

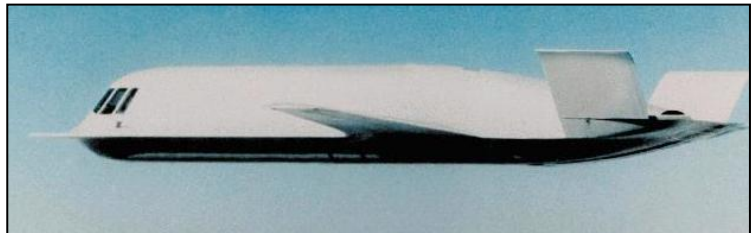


26 Apr 1966 **First MiG-21 kill.**  
An F-4C crew used Sidewinder missiles to shoot down a MiG-21 over North Vietnam. Major Paul J. Gilmore and 1st Lieutenant William T. Smith of the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing were escorting F-105 Thunderchiefs near Hanoi when the MiGs attacked. (MiG-21 photo at left.)

27 Apr 1972 **Smart Bomb Milestone.** Four USAF fighter crews, releasing Paveway I laser-guided “smart” bombs, knocked down the Thanh Hoa bridge in North Vietnam. Previously, 871 conventional sorties had inflicted only superficial damage to the bridge.



30 Apr 1996 The Air Force revealed the **Tacit Blue** aircraft secretly used during 1982-1985 to validate a number of innovative stealth technology advances. Tacit Blue (photos left and below) furnished much of the technology used to produce the B-2 Spirit bomber.



28 Apr 2003 **End of Operation SOUTHERN WATCH.** The Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) at Prince Sultan AB, Saudi Arabia, with responsibility for air operations in Southwest Asia, moved to Al Udeid AB, Qatar. The move coincided with the end of the enforcement of the no-fly zone in southern Iraq. On 29 April, at a joint news conference in Riyadh, SECDEF Donald Rumsfeld and Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz announced the withdrawal of all US combat forces from Saudi Arabia to end 12 years of a continuous US presence.

On 1 May, **Operation NORTHERN WATCH** ended at Incirlik AB, Turkey.